

September 2011

News from Madison County Commission District 6 Commissioner Bob Harrison

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Greetings,

When I began this newsletter a few months ago, it was my goal to increase transparency and share information about current projects and initiatives. Times are changing, and there is a greater need to communicate effectively with one another. I hope you enjoy this edition of my e-newsletter, and continue to stay plugged in.

Yours in Service,
Bob

The Changing Face of Poverty: One Year Later

Commissioner revisits last years poverty symposium with plans to feed 1200 families this Christmas season.

RECAP

Last October, Commissioner Harrison, in partnership with the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber of Commerce, sponsored a city wide symposium on poverty. This two day event, held at J's Special Occasion Event Center on Meridian Street, included a roundtable



Commissioner and staff member Cindy Cotton announce winner for gas card giveaway.

discussion and a community resource and job fair.

The roundtable discussion was moderated by Douglas Turner, of WJAB's popular radio show "Return to the Source". A diverse panel of community and faith based leaders began the weekend's activities with enlightening conversation regarding the role our society plays in helping those living in abject and impoverished conditions in Madison County. Reverend Earla Lockheart of First Baptist, and Pastor Wendell Davis of Union Chapel spoke on the roles our faith based institutions play in providing critical resources to needy families. Other members also spoke on topics pertaining to their work and expertise on topics like healthcare, affordable housing, public policy, economic development, and education.

The next day community resource agencies, prospective employers, and local community colleges across Madison County presented information at the Community Resource and Job Fair. The Huntsville Assistance Program, United Way of Madison County, Huntsville Utilities, The Department of Health and Human Services, The Community Action Partnership, Madison County Volunteer Lawyers, Verizon Wireless, Huntsville/ Madison Chamber of Commerce, and The North Alabama Food bank are some of the organizations that participated in this event.

With the help of District 6 staff members, the Commissioner announced gas and grocery card giveaways on the hour. Persons had to be on site to redeem prizes. District 6 Foreman Willie McCrary coordinated the distribution of fresh produce from the Commissioner's Community Harvest Garden. The goal of the weekend long symposium was to identify problems (opportunities) , and connect problems to resources. Special thanks to all those who organizations and agencies who worked to make the event possible.

UPDATE: A YEAR LATER

A year later and The District 6 Community Food bank has seen a steady increase in families desiring assistance. Just last month the USDA cited that of Alabama's 4.7 million residents, 1.7 million are receiving food assistance. The unemployment rate for Madison County is just below the 9.1 percent national average at 8.0 percent according to 2011 statistics from the Chamber of Commerce. Since the financial crisis hit hard in 2007 more families have fallen below the poverty threshold mandated by the Department of Health and Human Services. The face of poverty is changing. New faces are emerging, and some you might not recognize on first glance. These are your neighbors, co-workers, and

recent college graduates. The new face of the poverty is the working poor, those laid off, and those underemployed looking for work in a struggling economy.

Madison County District 6 is planning to spearhead an initiative to feed 1200 families during the Christmas season. The Commissioner shared his vision to feed more families than previous years. Sonji Patterson, Community Resource Coordinator for Madison County District 6, will coordinate the effort.

The dates for this year's food share are December 15-16, 2011. Last year, District 6 distributed over 600 food boxes to needy families. Stay tuned for future communications and details concerning this initiative.

Update: NEG Debris Removal

Progress being made to clear remaining storm debris

Progress continues to clear debris from last April's storm. Last month we shared information about a funding opportunity announced in May by Governor Robert Bentley.

Madison County applied

and received approval to hire Utility Workers to assist with clearing debris on public properties



Debris cleared on Colfax and Green Meadow Drive in Huntsville

affected by the severe weather. Funds were made available through a Federal Workforce Investment Act National Emergency Grant. This project is being administered by the Alabama Department of Economic and Community Affairs Workforce Development Division.

Work is occurring primarily in District 6, but has been expanded to include sites in other Commission districts. Utility workers have cleared debris in Districts 1 and 4. A current total of 58 workers are employed to clear debris on public properties in Madison County.

The working conditions are not easy, but most are thankful for the opportunity. For many this is the first after extended gaps of inactivity and unemployment. Last week, while working to clear debris in a Ditch located near Johnson High School, workers uncovered a

nest of snakes. Pulaski Pike, Deerfield Road, Green Meadow Road, Cedar Point Drive, and Oakwood Avenue are among sites cleared by District 6 Utility Workers.

The Commissioner hopes to continue these projects until all debris have been cleared. He hopes this will create the marketable skills needed for these workers to obtain gainful employment in Madison County.

Back to Books!

Commissioner Participates in City Back to School Events

August proved to be a busy month for Madison County Students! The Commissioner, along with other community leaders welcomed



Huntsville Students back to school at the 19th annual Back to School Parade and Festival. This event was sponsored by the Northwest Cluster of PTSA. The processional for the parade began at the Dollar General on Blue Springs Road, and ended on the campus of Johnson High School. This was a lively event with many northwest Huntsville schools participating.

The Circle Project, a current initiative of Madison County District 6, also welcomed students back to Morris and Rolling Hill's elementary schools in Huntsville. The program is housed within each school, and offers community resources to parents and students needing assistance.

District 6 employee, Helen Drake, administers the project for Morris Elementary School. This year they held a "Back to School Cookout" to encourage parental involvement. Turnout was exceptionally high with 167 families participating. Parents were able to sign up for Panda Parent University. This program allows parents to take continuing education classes at night. These classes range from household budgeting to computer literacy. Parents can also take basic reading and math classes to better help their children complete required homework assignments. Childcare is provided free of charge to allow more parents to participate.

Additionally, District 6 staff members also participated in the Community Awareness for Youth event sponsored by

the City of Huntsville Police Department. The event was a huge success with about 1000 youth gathering at the Huntsville Jaycess Building. Youth learned about the four pillars of success: Health, Physical Fitness, Education, and careers. Madison County District 6 served on the Food Preparation team.

District 6 would like to extend best wishes on a prosperous academic school year for all returning students. Lastly, We also want to remind parents about the free tutoring assistance provided at the Northwest Huntsville Community Learning Center. For more information contact (256)851-7242.

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Northwest Huntsville Senior Center Rebid

Because of some erroneous design assumptions the bid for construction of the Northwest Huntsville Senior Wellness Center came in over bid. For the last four weeks, the architect and engineering team have been going through some value engineering exercises to reduce costs but not quality. The process has been completed. Please find below our new re-bid revised schedule. We are excited about our value analysis, and the new start date for construction.

- Pre-qualification packet due date: Sept. 22, 2011 (previous pre-qualified contractors will not have to pre-qualify again)
- Mandatory pre-bid meeting: Sept. 27, 2011 10:00am
- Bid opening: October 13, 2011 2:00pm (base bid), 3:00pm (alternates & unit prices)

Community Flu Shot Clinic

In partnership with the Madison County Health Department, District 6 Commissioner Bob Harrison will sponsor a FREE flu clinic for the community on September 13, 2011 at the Alabama A&M University Health and Wellness Center. The address is 4011 Meridian Street, Normal Alabama 35762. Any member of the community can receive a FREE flu shot between the hours of 9am-

3pm.

This year Commissioner Harrison negotiated with Health Department officials to ensure vaccinations were available earlier in the season.

Please take advantage of this effort, as turnout will affect the number of vaccines received next year. For questions concerning this event contact the District 6 office at (256)532-1505.

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